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Anti-consumption as tactical resistance: Anarchists, subculture, and activist strategy

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Abstract
This article examines practices of anti-consumption deployed by anarchist activists as tactical actions within their overall projects of political and subcultural resistance. Drawing on existing literature on anti-consumers, my own interviews with anti-consumers, and analysis of materials that circulate in support of anti-consumption, I explore both the material and discursive effects of anti-consumption within a specific political subculture. I offer a typology of motivations for anti-consumption among activists, as well as a discussion of how overlaps and conflicts between various motivations complicate assessments of lifestyle-based resistance. I ultimately argue that the analysis I offer can prove helpful to political projects that utilize consumption-based tactics, in the construction and evaluation of effective activist strategies.

Keywords
activism, anti-consumption, consumption, ethics, identity, politics, subculture

A good deal of recent scholarship has sought to understand how consumer practices have been mobilized for ethical and activist projects. As many scholars of consumer culture have shown, people who identify with a particular political project often cultivate a coherent, recognizable body of consumption practices that are meant to make material their desires for altered social conditions. At the same time, there has been considerable academic interest in discourses and practices of anti-consumption. A third line of inquiry looks at radical anti-capitalist movements and subcultures, many of which position themselves in opposition to a consumption-centric social order. This article is situated at the intersection of these three

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streams of scholarship. Here, I seek to explicate how habitual practices of anti-consumption are enlisted by politicized individuals in their everyday lives. I am particularly interested in how anti-consumption practices can be understood as tactical actions within radical movements' projects of political change. This article examines the cultural discourses and resistant practices of a specific activist movement, one in which anti-consumption is part of the fabric of everyday life for participants.

Like all resistant practices, anti-consumption 'does' much more than directly subvert its object of opposition (i.e. consumption), thus I argue that any analysis or evaluation of anti-consumption must work from an enlarged understanding of resistance and its potential 'effects'. This article emphasizes the ways in which anti-consumption carries cultural and political significance for participants in activist movements, despite the fact that a purely non-consumptive lifestyle is an impossible achievement for anyone. My hope is that this emphasis on the discursive 'work' of anti-consumption will steer future conversations away from dismissals of anti-consumption practices as simply ineffective or hypocritical, and toward nuanced analyses of lifestyle-based tactics. As De Certeau's influential work on everyday resistance has argued, isolated acts of consumption can be analyzed as salvos in concerted campaigns at destabilizing the power structures of the status quo (De Certeau, 1984). The degree to which *tactics* coalesce into coordinated activist *strategy* depends largely on the effectiveness of cultural discourses in articulating individualized acts of resistance to larger political goals (Foucault, 1990a).

As I will show, anti-consumption is better understood as a lifestyle orientation than as a straightforward description of actual abstinence from consumption. That is, anti-consumption encompasses both abstinence from consumption *and* forms of consumption that are meant to signify opposition to consumption, even if the objective content of the practice seems to involve consuming something. As Penaloza and Price (1993) elegantly point out, 'the boundaries between consumption and resistance to consumption are porous', and so we should not be surprised that anti-consumption lifestyles are never purely free of consumption activities. Subcultural discourses that circulate among activists do much to position both particular consumption habits and particular non-consumption habits as elements of an overall anti-consumption lifestyle.

This article grew out of a qualitative study I conducted over a three-year period on the lifestyles and political projects of self-identified anarchists in contemporary North America. Anti-consumption practices figure largely in the lifestyles of many anarchists; discourses of resistance to consumption are prominent in the ethos of contemporary anarchism. This is particularly true in the subcultural segment of the modern anarchist movement on which my research focuses. While not all anarchists are identifiable as members of this subculture, anti-consumption and other cultural aspects of anarchism do serve as points of cohesion in a movement that is characterized by its decentralization and resistance to formal political structure. In the tradition of the subculture studies pioneered by Hall, Clarke, Hebdige and their Birmingham School colleagues (see Hall and Jefferson, 2005), my study

illuminates how anarchists' subculture provides a social and aesthetic backdrop against which everyday lifestyle practices are reproduced and endowed with resistant meaning. In this way subcultural discourses act as a frame within which individual anti-consumers can understand their actions as part of a particular, coherent activist strategy. The political and philosophical tenets of anarchism will become clearer below, when I describe how and why some anarchists practice anti-consumption.

I begin by discussing the methods by which I arrived at the findings presented in this article. I then provide descriptions of several typical anti-consumption practices along with brief accounts offered by practitioners and observers as to why these practices are undertaken. Building upon this knowledge, I set forth my own typology of motivations for anti-consumption. With this typology I hope to demonstrate the variety of ways anti-consumption might function. I then offer a discussion of how attention to this *range* of material and discursive potentialities holds utility for understanding and evaluating the strategic soundness of lifestyle-based tactics.

Research methods

This study involved a combination of research methods – observation, textual analysis, and interviews – which allowed me to develop a broad picture of anti-consumption practice and discourse within the anarchist movement. From 2007 to 2010, I observed as a participant at anarchism-oriented organizing meetings and events, such as bookfairs and conferences, in various locations across the USA. I read publications that circulate within the anarchist subculture, including zines, pamphlets, books, websites, blogs, and internet forums, looking both at the content presented and the discursive frames used to present it. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 39 individuals who self-identified as anarchists. While I was able to make direct observation of most of the anti-consumption practices described below, the bulk of my data is derived from verbal and written accounts of anti-consumption practice. My methodological approach combines 'etic' and 'emic' perspectives (Pike, 1967): I am interested in the material or objective reality of anarchists' anti-consumption practices, but even more in how anti-consumers understand and assign meaning to those practices.

All interviewees were living in the USA or Canada at the time of our interview, about half living in or near Los Angeles (where I was based) and half in other cities. I recruited interviewees at events I attended, on anarchist email lists, and through referrals from personal acquaintances of mine and previous interviewees. I explained to participants that I was interested in the relationship between lifestyle and radical political movements, and that while I was not an anarchist myself, my feminist and queer political identities often put me in solidarity with anarchist projects. Participants were promised anonymity, thus all interviewee names used in this article are pseudonyms. When feasible, the interviews were conducted in person and audio-recorded; in some cases the interviews took place via email

exchange or instant message.[1] The style of the interviews was conversational, meaning that I was able to follow up on the responses with more specific questions where I felt clarification would be illuminating. When the interviews took place via email or instant messenger, this meant posing a question or two at a time and then waiting for and following up on interviewees' responses before moving on to new questions. I asked a range of open-ended questions about interviewees' experience as anarchists and activists.[2] From the audio-recordings, email exchanges, and instant message sessions, I generated verbatim transcripts of all the interviews. I then went through the transcripts by hand and coded them for prominent themes and topic areas, such as 'consumption practices'. On subsequent passes through the transcripts I coded for subtopics, such as 'veganism' and 'shoplifting'. Throughout this process I also analyzed textual documents and my observation fieldnotes, identifying and making notes on the same themes, topics, and subtopics that emerged in the interviews.

Like any social movement, contemporary anarchism is not monolithic; anarchism in particular is fundamentally opposed to a 'party line', thus I cannot claim to represent all anarchists or anti-consumers with the data presented here. I did, however, strive for diversity in the events I attended, the texts I examined, and the individuals I interviewed, gathering perspectives from anarchists of varying ethnic backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, and class statuses.[3] I see this examination of anarchist anti-consumers as a case study that can 'create opportunities for understanding' anti-consumption practices more generally (Newholm, 2005, 109). Certainly there are specificities to the experiences and identities of the anarchists quoted here which may not be generalizable across all ethical consumers and anti-consumers. However, I have attempted to take my analysis to a level of abstraction which will make it applicable to a broader population of ethical consumers.

Practices of anti-consumption

Several of the individuals I interviewed explained that once they began to identity as anarchists they started refusing to consume things that many middle-class Americans consider to be basic features of everyday life. Josef, a 28-year-old Latino graduate student, described himself as 'an anarchist Los Angeles pirate' because he chooses to forego 'luxuries' such as having a car and a stable home. For anarchists like Josef, needs are distinguished from luxuries through a critical lens that understands most consumer desires to be the product of false consciousness, induced by corporations, in the interest of promoting rampant material acquisition. Personal hygiene is a notable area in which many anarchists do without products that mainstream consumers buy as a matter of course. Grant, in his mid-20s, white, and living in Washington DC, said that since becoming involved with anarchism, he no longer felt it necessary to take a shower every day. For him, this was about 'being comfortable with the way your body naturally exists and not succumbing to pressure from the dominant society'. Mass marketed soaps, shampoos, and

deodorants are all seen as unnecessary chemicals foisted upon consumers by greedy capitalists. The authors of a popular anarchist book called *Days of War, Nights of Love* assert that 'western [sic]' standards of cleanliness are rooted in class hierarchies, wherein 'those who possessed the wealth and power required to have the leisure to remain indoors, inactive, scorned the peasants and travelers whose lifestyles involved getting their hands and bodies dirty' (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective, 2000: 121). They go on to argue that 'these days, cleanliness is defined more by corporations selling "sanitation products"... When we accept their definition of "cleanliness" we are accepting their economic domination of our lives' (2000: 122–3). The way to subvert these hierarchies, they argue, is to reject hygiene standards in one's daily routine.

Veganism is another common form of anti-consumption among anarchists. The decision not to consume any animal-derived products may be constructed as a practice of political solidarity with non-human creatures, against an industry that systematically exploits human power over animals. Many of my interviewees were vegetarians before they learned about or identified with anarchism, but 'went vegan' when they became able to connect an anarchist opposition to hierarchy with their previous distaste for animal slaughter. Sally, a 19-year-old white college student in LA, explained how veganism is for her also an explicit protest against ideological manipulation by capitalist interests:

> I had become vegetarian for a couple months at a time in high school and that was very much based on sort of the emotional not wanting to eat animals sense, but then I don't think it really stuck until it became a lot more political and about consumption and about... the kinds of consumption that capitalism encourages you to have... especially the marketing to think you need to eat so much meat and need to drink so much milk, that really started bothering me and seeing it as just creating a need that just isn't there...

Branch, a 28-year-old white Australian who attended graduate school in LA, similarly explained that anarchist vegans see their diets 'as avoiding "the system" in terms of the meat industry or the dairy industry, practices of, you know, modern-day sort of farming and agriculture and things like that'. For Branch, too, specialized dietary practices had followed his politicization and integration into a local anarchist community.

Another consumer item that many people consider a need, but that anarchists do not, is an automobile. Even in a city like LA, a sprawling metropolis known for its car culture, most of the anarchists I met did not own an automobile. This was true for interviewees located in other cities as well. Even if they did have access to a car, they usually chose to commute to work, school, and other activities by bicycle. As evidence of the close relationship between bike culture and anarchist identity, several interviewees said they got into cycling as a serious mode of transportation around the same time they became politicized, even if they had ridden bikes recreationally earlier in their lives. As Tina, a 23-year-old Latina college student

in LA recalled: 'I started riding a bike probably three, three and a half years ago, I think the whole radicalization happened around that time, so bike riding comes with it you know.' Sometimes several people may share ownership of an automobile, because there are some (infrequent) circumstances in which commuting by bicycle may be impossible. This illustrates another means by which anarchists reduce their commercial consumption: sharing commodities among many people, taking advantage of economies of scale to avoid expending a lot of money on necessities. A related example is the common anarchist practice of co-habiting together in large numbers – anywhere from half a dozen to more than 20 people – a practice known as cooperative housing or collective living. By living together in groups, anarchists spend less on rent, groceries, utility bills and other household expenditures than they would if they lived alone or in small numbers, as is the norm for mainstream middle-class Americans. A 25-year-old white graduate student from Denver named Revbaker explained his involvement in cooperative housing (or 'co-ops') this way:

> I first learned of collective living after visiting a few student coops [sic] in Boulder. I was definitely impressed and heavily influenced by the whole idea. It seemed like a natural and even necessary embodiment, or manifestation, of radical politics. Something like, 'If you believe that humans can live in different ways from mainstream society, and in fact can live in ways that are counter to prevailing societal institutions (nuclear family, competition, over-consumption, coercion, etc.) then prove it.' And so we did, or are at least, we are trying.

Most of the individuals I interviewed had lived in a collective house at one point or another.

DIY ('do it yourself') practices constitute another mode of anti-consumption. The idea behind DIY is that when possible one should put one's own, unalienated labor toward producing the things one needs, rather than putting money toward practices and industries that exploit workers and natural resources. Knowing how to repair things for oneself also keeps one from having either to pay others to do it or to spend money on new things to replace the old. A 23-year-old white interviewee in LA named Orlando explained to me that he saw bicycle commuting as an example of DIY, in that it involves using one's own physical energy to transport oneself rather than gasoline purchased from a corrupt oil corporation. Anarcho-cyclists (a term used by some anarchist bike enthusiasts) may also become versed in DIY bike repair, with the aid of specifically anarchist books, zines, and instruction from comrades. Politicized bike cultures often build institutions that foster DIY practices and operate under anarchist organizing principles. For example, the Bicycle Kitchen in LA is a non-hierarchically organized, volunteer-run workshop that exists to promote cycling as an alternative to driving, and to provide the means for cyclists to build, maintain, and repair their own bikes using salvaged parts, rather than further contributing to capitalist patterns of waste and alienated labor.

The DIY principle can be, and is, applied to almost everything anarchists consume. For example, growing one's own food (or even hunting it, as one non-vegetarian interviewee from rural Vermont does) is a common DIY practice, as is making and mending one's own clothing. At the TOW Warehouse, a collective space in downtown LA, organizers put on regular workshops where participants share knowledge and skills to make things that they would otherwise have to buy from corporations, such as LED bike lights or home-brewed beer. As Tom, a 27-year-old white music teacher, explained to me, TOW stands for Theater of Work, which symbolizes that the space is a place to work and be productive, but for one's own benefit and not through selling one's labor to others who have the means to exploit it. The reference to theatricality could be thought, furthermore, to symbolize a commitment to performing alternatives in a visible way, so as to communicate a political message. Josef explained the activities at TOW in less abstract terms: 'that's another thing we do because we're anarchists! We brew our own beer now, cuz, fuck supporting the liquor stores, and you know what, fuck liquor stores.'

In some cases, the above methods are not feasible, as when particular goods are needed for health and survival, or simply to satisfy personal desires. In these instances, anarchists may utilize extra-commercial means of obtaining goods, which allows them to consume without providing financial support to capitalist corporations. One common means of doing so is to share and trade with friends. For Minty, a white 28-year-old community organizer in LA, consuming in an anarchist way is about finding alternatives to capitalist exchange within her own circle of acquaintances. She explained this using a few examples:

> It's knowing the resources that are already in the network of people that you trust and using them whether it be DIY gynecology or clothing. Like, a lot of my friends knit, so when I'm in New York, [it's] buying their scarves and their hats and mittens, or doing like a barter versus going to like Urban Outfitters you know? So knowing what resources are in your group of friends and utilizing that versus anywhere else.

Minty thus sees her social network as an alternative to capitalist retail establishments. In this vein, Gabby, a 25-year-old journalist of Filipina descent living in LA, also finds friends who can provide services she needs, and in turn she shares her own skills. She mentioned, for instance, that she was taking violin lessons from a friend and cooking meals for him in exchange. Some anarchists have more permanently institutionalized the practice of sharing, establishing 'free stores' where people can convene to donate their unwanted belongings to each other.

Anarchists may also scavenge for discarded goods that are not necessarily intended to be shared or re-used, but that still hold use value. The term for such scavenging is 'dumpster diving' (sometimes abbreviated to 'dumpstering') owing to the fact that commercial institutions often discard perfectly usable goods in trash bins, which the plucky scavenger can climb (dive) into and root through. Dumpster diving has become something of a refined skill among anarchists, with zines and

articles written on the subject of how to most effectively and efficiently obtain the best refuse. Depending on the availability of well-stocked dumpsters in one's area, one may be able to obtain most commodities, including food, for free. Food retailers in particular often discard mass quantities of edible product for purely cosmetic reasons – the produce is marred, the boxes are crushed, or the expiration date has recently passed. In addition to being a practical strategy for finding food, clothes, appliances, and furniture, dumpstering is positioned by anarchists as an act of protest against the wastefulness of the commercial retail system, in which things that are superficially damaged or just out of fashion are thrown away, though their use value is intact.

Another means by which anarchists may attempt to obtain consumable goods without monetary expenditure is shoplifting. Obviously, this method poses a certain amount of risk to the practitioner, as it is a criminal activity. Ideologically, anarchists can justify theft as an act of legitimate property redistribution within a system that they believe to be 'criminal' in a more metaphorical, moral sense. In other words, because the system of capitalist exchange enables corporations to 'steal' labor and natural resources, there is nothing morally objectionable in anarchists reappropriating the products those corporations sell for profit. This logic accounts for Gabby explaining to me that she doesn't shoplift at 'mom and pop' establishments, only big chain stores.

Practices that involve the appropriation of consumer items at no monetary cost can be encompassed under the umbrella designation of 'freeganism'. The term freegan comes from a combination of the words 'free' and 'vegan' and traditionally refers to a diet in which animal-based (non-vegan) food products may be consumed, but only if they can be obtained for free, so as not to contribute to market demand for animal products. Joel, a 25-year old white graduate student in LA, for example, regularly consumes dairy products if they will otherwise be discarded. I actually witnessed Joel deftly take a piece of lemon meringue pie off a vacated table at a restaurant when he saw that the diner had left it untouched and was told by the server that it would be thrown away. Because he was not paying for the pie, he did not see himself as financially supporting the producers or distributors of the eggs and dairy that had gone into making it, thus he did not see himself as contributing to the economic demand for animal products. Freegans register their critique of consumer capitalism and its attendant hierarchies, not by abstaining from consumption, but by abstaining from *paying for* their consumption. They also see themselves as extracting material value from the system without putting value back in, thus weakening the system in a small way. The freegan lifestyle may extend beyond dietary practices to encompass a holistic orientation toward not making financial contribution to the offenders in the capitalist system.

These examples do not exhaust the range of anti-consumption practices adopted by anarchists and other politically-identified subjects. But they offer a few points of reference to keep in mind as we move forward with developing a typology of motivations that direct such practices.

Typology of anti-consumption motivations

Foucault defines a practice as 'a 'way of doing things' oriented toward objectives and regulating itself by means of a sustained reflection' (1997: 74). In this formulation, a practice is not merely a random action; rather it refers to a pattern of behaviors that are informed by reasoned thought and directed toward conscious goals. Like all practices of consumption, anti-consumption practices are both material *and* discursive, carrying with them ideological frameworks and agendas. The typology I offer makes analytical distinctions between several different kinds of goals that might motivate anti-consumption behavior. As other scholars of politicized consumption have observed, these goals may overlap in the real world, and they are often not clearly demarcated in the minds of practitioners – that is, multiple motivations may converge in the same behavior. For example, Connolly and Prothero (2008) found that 'green' consumers were motivated simultaneously by concerns about environmental risks and threats to the personal health of their own families. Sassatelli and Davolio (2010) found that 'eco-gastronomes' who join the Slow Food movement combine aesthetic pleasure in food with ethical commitments to sustainable food production. I will discuss the real-world overlaps further below, but for now I will present my typology in terms of pure categories, in the interest of analytical clarity. I use the term motivations here because it is easier to observe and measure the stated intentions behind practices than it is to assess whether anti-consumption practices actually achieve their intended effects. Hypothetically, this typology *could* be used to evaluate outcomes in addition to intentions, an idea that I will also discuss further below.

Personal motivations

Personal motivations for anti-consumption practices have to do with finding immediate personal benefit in these alternative consumption experiences. For example, anarchists believe that capitalist entities will try to exploit and alienate them through consumerism, and so they try to thwart these effects on themselves by abstaining from commercial consumption as much as possible. Anti-capitalists argue that capitalism retains its power by 'integrating' consumers into the system of wage labor, keeping them docile and foreclosing the development of a 'revolutionary consciousness' (Marcuse, 1972: 14). By rejecting commercial consumption, anarchists reduce their own incentive to earn money, thus releasing themselves as much as possible from the intrinsically exploitative conditions of wage labor. Expressions like this one (from a zine called *Why Freegan?*) – 'You don't have to compromise yourself and your humanity to the evil demon of wage-slavery!' (koala!, n.d.: 2) – are not uncommon in contemporary anarchist discourse. The zine goes on to say, 'Working sucks and if a little scavenging can keep you from needing a job than [sic] go jump in a dumpster!' (n.d.: 3). Consumption habits like dumpstering are thus offered as a solution to the problem of the alienation that comes of 'working long hours at a dehumanizing job' (n.d.: 2). Along similar lines, Emily,

a 28-year-old white graduate student in LA, explained one of her reasons for getting around by bike and public transit, instead of owning her own car, 'I also don't like to work that much . . . and if you don't have a car, you don't have to work as much, because you don't have to pay for a car. Cars cost a lot of money – I think people don't realize how much they cost because I don't think people sit back and look at it.'

Anarchists also understand their conscious rejection of consumerism as a means of resistance against being personally ideologically manipulated. In other words, they attempt not to succumb to the 'false needs' imposed by dominant consumerist ideology, and as a result, they see themselves as being able to lead more enjoyable, liberated lives. Josef alluded to the personal benefits that come from actively rejecting the standards of mainstream culture: 'I'm not gonna subscribe to all that shit because it's just gonna make me depressed anyway, cuz I don't look like Cindy Crawford and I wouldn't want to be Brad Pitt anyways!' Joel expressed his feeling that 'it makes you a more interesting person' when you 'diverge a little bit from the mainstream'. He brought this up in the context of talking about how being a vegan has forced him to try different kinds of cuisine than he might have, had his diet been more conventional.

Moral motivations

Moral anti-consumption describes practices that are motivated by judgments about right and wrong. Here, acting morally is about being able to live with oneself, about holding oneself personally accountable for living consistently with one's values, and with feeling personally responsible for the concrete impacts one's consumption has on others. In other words, 'it [is] a case of integrity', as Newholm (2005: 114) describes in his own case study of ethical consumers. Anti-consumption practices are construed as moral in that, by reducing one's demand for goods produced under objectionable conditions, one reduces one's complicity with the system or entities that perpetuate those conditions. To give a basic example, several interviewees said they made a point of wearing used clothing so as to avoid personally contributing money to companies that employ sweatshop labor. Furthermore, by establishing a regular lifestyle habit of not consuming new clothes, anti-consumers attempt to remove themselves from a global economic circuit in which clothing manufacturers tend to locate their production in places with lax labor regulations, the result being exploitative conditions across the clothing industry. By not participating in the consumption of new clothes, anti-consumers can feel they have acted with integrity in the face of widespread corporate immorality. Veganism too is frequently understood as a moral practice. Joel explained that he believes human dominance over animals is unjustifiable in moral terms. For Joel, to eat meat or wear leather shoes would be to personally benefit from the industrialization of that dominance, and thus those acts of consumption on his part would be illegitimate exercises of human power. In Joel's words, coming to that belief made it 'so easy for me to be vegan'.

In my typology, whether a practice is moral or not is independent of its actual potential to generate change. That is, I am not operating from a consequentialist picture of morality (Barnett, Cafaro et al., 2005). Rather, I am more concerned with whether the individual act of consumption, or non-consumption as the case may be, is understood to be in line with the actor's philosophical principles. To illustrate this idea, Josef pointed out a moral consistency between anarchism and certain forms of consumption: 'just do whatever the fuck you want, but don't be, like, promoting what you're trying to fight against. Like, if you're, if you're an anarchist but you're like, gonna go eat at McDonalds, you gotta check yourself right there, you know?' For Josef, acting morally means subjecting oneself to 'checks' to ensure that one is not violating one's own political commitments.

Activist motivations

There is an important analytical difference between doing something because it is morally right in itself, and doing something in order to put pressure on a system or larger entity to *alter a pattern* of immoral practice. This other type of motivation is what I would call an activist motivation. Whether a practice has activist motivations or not depends on whether the practitioner is attempting to use their actions to effect a change in current conditions. For anarchists, activist consumption often involves attempts to leverage personal finances toward subverting or correcting the objectionable aspects of the entire capitalist system. A book called *The Philosophy of Punk* expresses this view: 'One of the best ways to *refuse and resist a destructive capitalist system* is to vote economically, spending dough where you feel it has the least harmful effect' (O'Hara, 1999: 131, emphasis added). Anti-consumption that occurs under the aegis of a strike or boycott falls into this categeory. There is an extensive literature on this mode of anti-consumption (see, e.g., Micheletti, 2003; Smith, 1990), so I will not go into much further depth here. Suffice it to say that the reasoning behind activist anti-consumption is that if enough individuals withdraw their resources from the system of corporate capitalism, that system will eventually 'have a real battle on its hands', in the words of one commenter on an anarchist email list.

Activist anti-consumption may also entail a communicative motivation. As Kozinets and Handelman (2004) found in their own ethnographic study, 'Activist informants . . . insisted that they were not only trying to alter some specific corporate or industry behavior . . . They repeatedly emphasized that they were also trying to elevate consumers' collective awareness and, through it, to change consumer culture and ideology' (2004: 693). Many anarchists similarly understand their lifestyle practices as instances of 'prefigurative politics' or 'propaganda by the deed' (see Gordon, 2008). The communicative logic of prefigurative politics rests on implicit assumptions about the capacity of small-scale actions to work as theatrical spectacles that publicly represent political ideologies and convince others of their correctness. In this way, lifestyle practices are seen as rhetorical acts with the capacity to persuade and inspire others. Recall Revbaker's comment above

about collective housing being a means of 'proving' the legitimacy of anarchist alternatives to consumerist society. Emily also expressed that she felt it was important for anarchists to show that their way of life 'actually work[s]', that 'it's a viable model' for a more just society.

Identificatory motivations

The fact that many of the practices I discussed above (e.g. veganism, bicycling) are adopted alongside the assumption of an anarchist identity further supports the idea that politicized subjects call on anti-consumption practices for their performative value. In other words, these practices are important in part because they are rituals that establish the practitioner as a certain kind of (politicized) person (Goffman, 1959). The performative dimensions of consumption (and, by implication, anti-consumption) are discussed by Giddens in his exploration of 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991). As Giddens explains, 'A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (1991: 81). In the case of anarchist anti-consumers, practices of refusal, DIY, and the like, are material expressions of what it means to be an anarchist. Constructing such an identity narrative is both an individual and a collective process. That is, performances of self are both intra-subjective and intersubjective: the performance is done for oneself and also for others. Foucault, too, discusses the importance of habitual behaviors in the cultivation of selfhood as an aesthetic or narrative project (see Foucault, 1988a, 1990b). Material performances of anti-consumption, in this capacity, become a Foucaultian 'technology of the self,' a dramatization of political commitment that constitutes the performer as particular kind of subject (Foucault, 1988b).

Emily described her transition into vegetarianism, as a teenager, in such terms, 'I was also really into imagining myself in certain ways and I wanted to imagine myself as the kind of person I wanted to be – you know, when I grew up – and I kind of figured that the kind of person I wanted to be would be a vegetarian, you know? I guess I just sort of figured it went along with the lifetsyle.' Josef expressed a similar sentiment, a bit more succinctly: 'I'm vegan because I think that's what real anarchists should be.' Josef's offhand invocation of authenticity is telling. The rhetorical figure of the 'real' anarchist is a powerful one that features largely in the internal discourse of the anarchist milieu. It is unsurprising then that those who wish to be identified as anarchists would be motivated to orient their behaviors toward those habits that are most commonly accepted by their peers, and themselves, as authentically anarchist.

Social motivations

Beyond establishing one's own identity, one may also use cultural practices to unite one with others who share similar goals, and to differentiate one from

those who don't (Durkheim, 1995). In this way, anti-consumption is a means of achieving solidarity among participants in the anarchist movement. Individual habits may reinforce one's affinity to an imagined community of fellow anti-consumers, in much the same way that consumers of the same product cultivate a sense of community. The difference, of course, is that while mainstream consumption communities unite around meanings they share with marketers and the dominant culture (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), anarchist anti-consumers unite around their symbolic rejection of mainstream consumption. Anti-consumption may even spur more social cohesion than shared consumption practices do because of its association with radical resistance to mainstream ideologies and mores. We can see the anarchist lifestyle as a sort of 'conspicuous anti-consumption', to repurpose Veblen's famous sociological analysis, in which those who aspire to fit in with the elite class engage in conspicuous consumption in order to demonstrate their belonging (Veblen, 1994).

Matthew's explanation of his decision to throw away his television set resonates with these ideas. Matthew, a white college professor in his early 30s living in Texas, told me that he hated television and had thrown his set away around the time of his becoming politicized. He later explained that he and his fellow activists were influenced by theorists Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as Debord and Vaneigem, and objected to television on the basis that it is a tool of capitalist control. He went on to note that no one he knew was really afraid that their television would brainwash them, but for them, 'the rejection of TV . . . was more symbolic than anything else'. The fact that others were engaged in similar performances of disgust with the culture industry and its products was crucial for Matthew; he reflected, 'I'd like to chalk it up to deep-seated conviction but in 1999 it was just the hip thing to do, at least in the anti-globalization movement. In all honesty I was just going with the flow!'

Often, people are rewarded for 'going with the flow' through the conferral of 'cultural capital', a concept developed by Bourdieu (1984) to refer to the status that accrues to individuals who possess certain tastes and habits that are valued in a particular social context. Thornton's (1996) repurposing of this concept as 'subcultural capital' is usefully applied to those instances in which an individual accrues social status in the anarchist milieu based on the extent to which their tastes deviate from the mainstream and conform to anarchist norms. What distinguishes the normative tastes of political movements from those of other subcultures is their basis in explicit political critique. All subcultures are engaged in struggles for power, and might thus be thought of as political, but anarchists are somewhat unique in that they quite self-consciously define their subcultural identity by a collective vision for social change. This is clear from the way that most of the practices discussed here are positioned by their practitioners as expressions of political philosophy. For instance, Josef told me, 'I wouldn't want to cipher or hang out with somebody who is like, like really obsessed with the Beyoncé dance routines so they can impress people at a club, like that to me is kinda lame'. At first this seems to be a simple taste distinction, but he quickly positioned his tastes in

terms of his political project, elaborating with, 'what I'm trying to say is I wouldn't want to like surround myself with, you know, people who watch football games and drink Budweiser and go to strip joints or whatever, who contribute to the violence, you know'. Importantly, Josef claimed that he doesn't want to hang out with people who do these things not just because he happens not to like the activities, but because he sees the activities as, in themselves, 'contributing to the violence' of the capitalist, hierarchal society to which he positions himself in opposition.

Soper (2008) uses the idea of 'aesthetic revisioning' to discuss the impact that politicization can have on individual tastes. The idea is that, as individuals come to radical political consciousness, their tastes change accordingly. 'Persons or objects or behaviours or practices that were formerly erotically seductive or aesthetically compelling yield their enchantment to others that previously held little of those attractions' (Soper, 2008: 580). So, for example, Matthew's taste for television was 'revisioned' because of his politicization and simultaneous immersion in a subcultural milieu in which a rejection of mainstream media was the norm. The multiple aspects of Matthew's decision to throw away his TV show the complex intersection of motivations behind anti-consumption practices – the personal hatred he felt toward television was inextricably bound up with his activist critique of the culture industry and his tendency to 'go with the flow' of the social movement with which he identified.

Further discussion

As my study and others have shown, any specific instance of anti-consumption is likely to be motivated by multiple goals, with varying degrees of consciousness on the part of the actor. One goal may even 'over-determine' others, as Soper points out in her work on ethical consumption (2007: 212–13). For example, if one's identity is defined by the extent to which one acts in a moral manner, the moral and identificatory motivations will be practically inseparable (Barnett, Cloke et al., 2005). It is important to sketch out the multiple dimensions of political (anti-)consumption practices, both to see how they may work to constitute each other, and to identify potential points of contradiction. I will offer a few additional examples from my research that illustrate the utility of an analysis that takes multiple motivations and outcomes into account.

Leo was one interviewee who had at one time been enthusiastic about typically anarchist lifestyle practices such as veganism and bicycling, but he had since abandoned them. Unlike many of my other interviewees, Leo did not look particularly like an anarchist: he wore a clean, loose-fitting button-down shirt, had no visible tattoos or piercings, and arrived at our interview driving a car. He was 32 years old, working in a hospital, and attending community college. He described himself as the child of a Salvadorean communist, and was raising a young daughter of his own. When I asked Leo why he had given up many of the typical anarchist consumption practices, he said that one reason was that, 'I guess I thought that maybe

the position of struggle might be somewhere else. That that wasn't even a struggle?' He also pointed out that a lot of the lifestyle practices adopted by self-identified radicals, such as gardening and bicycling, might seem appealingly 'revolutionary' but that ultimately those choices don't radically subvert the state or the capitalist economy. In part, this realization came about for him because of the ease with which corporate brands were able to integrate his lifestyle choices into their profit models. By way of example, Leo voiced his distaste for Whole Foods Market consumers and his frustration at seeing, 'my desires and my moral position, ethical position, be so co-opted into a whole other kind of consumer class'. Although he had at one time felt good about his ethical consumption practices, he stopped feeling so good when he realized that he shared many of them with people whose politics and social position he didn't share. The *personal* and *moral* outcomes of Leo's consumption habits were ostensibly unchanged, yet the *identificatory* and *social* ramifications were shifted as result of the mainstreaming of his habits.

Leo also saw the *activist* potential of his practices as being defused through their co-optation by the Whole Foods Market corporation, because his motivation had initially been to subvert capitalism itself. Indeed, this example demonstrates that certain personal and moral orientations may be quite compatible with capitalism, provided corporations are willing to adapt to 'alternative' preferences (and they usually are). Individual practices of veganism, for instance, are not *intrinsically* incompatible with capitalism, as has been shown by the burgeoning niche market for vegan food and other consumables. Yet, just because vegan consumers have been targeted by capitalist corporations doesn't mean that the moral justifications for veganism held by those consumers are eviscerated. Gardening and biking may not be intrinsically anti-capitalist if capital can find a way to exploit the demand for them, but certainly there are other benefits to these practices. The analytical separation I advocate is important here, because it allows for a critical assessment of lifestyle politics even in light of corporate co-optation.

To offer another example, the organizers of an anarchist event held in downtown LA in 2009 were targets of criticism on the basis that their event was too oriented toward lifestyle and consumption activities. The event, called an 'Anarchist Café' by its organizers, was declared 'a bust' by one anonymous critic who posted a review to a blog called *The LA Anarchist Weekly*. In the review, the café attendee criticized the fact that the event was too focused on 'subcultural' aspects of anarchism such as vegan nutrition; they also found it objectionable that there was an admission charge in addition to vendors selling books and shirts. The reviewer's damning conclusion: 'The Downtown LA Anarchist Cafe = anarchist (as in vegan, trendy, hipster) identity for SALE. Epic Fail.'

Yet the organizers were aware of the multiplicity of motivations potentially involved in such an event. They responded to the criticism by saying that that particular event 'was not about bring on a Revolution or lets over throw [sic]'. On a local listserv, another commenter argued that the purpose of every event does not need to be to stage revolution, saying: 'These types of events should be enjoyed

as social decompressors, spaces which are provided for, hopefully, activist and anarchist networking. But they are in no way a substitute or alternative for actual community organizing & movement building which we are ALL responsible for.' Comments like these show that practices of lifestyle politics are meant to serve multiple functions beyond their activist effects, and not all of these functions are necessarily aimed at revolutionary social change. As I have tried to show in this article, (anti-)consumption practices are also fruitfully understood as a set of rituals through which anarchists accomplish many things, not least of which is the reproduction of themselves as a resistant subculture. An understanding that practices may fulfill different goals to different degrees allows for flexibility and adaptability rather than wholesale condemnation or celebration of a given tactic. Anti-consumption clearly 'does' things other than effect sweeping social change – it performs identity, it builds culture, and so on. Along the way, it may shore up new forms of distinction – social divisions based on taste (Bourdieu, 1984) – that prevent anarchists from reaching people outside their subculture and even pit them against each other in struggles over authenticity. The fact that individual practices are accorded such political significance within activist discourses encourages people to be all the more invested in distinguishing themselves from those who make different choices. The rhetorical construction and defense of these distinctions may take a moralistic tone, claiming superiority for certain lifestyles and shutting down productive discussion about the tactical benefits of specific consumption practices.

Being highly conscious of the many potential motivations (and effects) of anti-consumption can help activists not to fetishize anti-consumption as a tactic, not to confuse its satisfaction of certain needs and desires with its fulfillment of the promise of social change. In fact it is strategically useful to be able to recognize when anti-consumption fulfills one goal and works *against* another. Specific lifestyle practices can be evaluated on the basis of their various effects and practitioners can retain or discard the practices based on the extent to which they fulfill their intended purpose.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the literature on ethical consumption by illuminating practices of anti-consumption undertaken by politically identified subjects. My research shows that anti-consumption practices are full of significance that goes beyond their immediate material effects. This work takes up De Certeau's project of looking at how consumers resist domination in their everyday lives, but with a twist, because my focus is on acts of consumption that are in fact positioned as anti-consumption. The political anti-consumers of my study do consume goods and services, but they often try to do so in such a way that they don't support the system of consumer capitalism; that is, they will find means of obtaining these things without engaging in traditional commercial exchange. Analytically, we can identify at least five motivations for anti-consumption behavior: individuals may be

motivated by personal, moral, activist, identificatory, and/or social concerns. In any given instance, multiple concerns may be in play, and at different degrees of consciousness or acknowledgement on the part of the anti-consumer themselves. It is useful to tease out the various types of motivations, not only because this gives a fuller picture of why people behave the way they do, but also because this can help us to assess the potential effects achieved by anti-consumption practices and lifestyles.

These questions are important not only for social scientific precision, but also for movement strategy. Given that many anti-consumers do align themselves with projects of change (social, political, economic, environmental), and many scholars of consumption and anti-consumption seem to evince an affinity with these projects as well, I think that if we can produce more nuanced, precise analyses of lifestyle-based tactics, we are better positioned to evaluate whether any *particular* instance of anti-consumption is effective at accomplishing its implicit or explicit aims. Furthermore, this kind of reflexive critique may be useful in the construction of campaigns and lifestyle practices that are more successful in realizing concrete political goals. Future reflection, both by academics and by consumer activists themselves, must take into account the complexity and nuance of political lifestyle practices, if they are to be fully understood and most effectively mobilized for projects of social change.

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Notes

1. Each interviewee quoted in this article is identified by their city of residence. Those living in LA were interviewed in person; those living elsewhere were interviewed electronically. Although information collected via electronic communication lacks some of the richness of in-person conversation, I felt the benefits, particularly the ability conveniently to interview individuals living in diverse geographical locations, outweighed this drawback. For a more in-depth discussion of the affordances and limitations of various interview methods, including 'researcher absent' methods, see Bird (2003).
2. My interview questions were not limited to the topic of consumption/anti-consumption, because my larger study was concerned with many aspects of anarchists' lifestyles. For example, I also asked participants about their sexual practices and romantic relationships; see Portwood-Stacer (2010) for a presentation of this research.
3. While many of the interviewees quoted here are college students and graduate students, I want to emphasize that there is no straightforward relationship between student status and economic privilege among my interviewees. For example, among the students I interviewed were middle-class children of professionals, individuals from immigrant and working-class families, and individuals who explicitly identified as poor. An intersectional analysis that theorizes differences in anti-consumption practice across social

categories would be illuminating, though, unfortunately, I do not have space in this article to provide such an analysis.

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